

INTERVIEW WITH WARREN PARKER
BY GEORGE GENTRY NOVEMBER 2, 2000

MR. PARKER: My name is Warren T. Parker. I served with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for thirty-two years. I came to Ashville, North Carolina in 1977 as the Endangered Species Coordinator in the old area office, back when we had area offices. The area offices folded up in the early 1980s. We moved through another reorganization and I was left as the Field Supervisor of an Endangered Species Field Office in Ashville. I recruited personnel for the office and I served as Field Supervisor from roughly 1981 through late 1984. I then became the Red Wolf Coordinator for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As the Red Wolf Coordinator I actually inherited a lot of work from Curtis Carley who had been the Fish and Wildlife Service Red Wolf Specialist for many years, but in Region 2. Since Region 4 suddenly became directly involved in the Red Wolf Recovery program Region 4 insisted that he bow out of the project, or else move to Region 4, which he wouldn't do. I became the Red Wolf Coordinator. If I am not mistaken, the Red Wolf Coordinator may have been one of the first Endangered Species Coordinators.

MR. GENTRY: It was the first. So you were actually the second person to take over the recovery of that endangered species.

MR. PARKER: The recovery, that's correct. One of the first things that I did was to appoint a Recovery Team. My knowledge of Wolves was sparse. The reason for my being appointed as the Endangered Species Coordinator was because of the location of the reintroduction sites. I had worked for two years with Curt Carley at Land Between the Lakes over in western Tennessee and Kentucky on a proposed reintroduction project in conjunction with TVA. Because as Field Supervisor, my responsibility included Kentucky and Tennessee, North and South Carolina and all endangered species activities in those four states. I was almost mandated to become directly involved in that project of the national significance of the reintroduction of an "extinct in the wild" species. I spent a great deal of time in the Land Between the Lakes area for two years with Curt on that project. The main failure of that project was that we did not have an experimental nonessential designation for endangered animals at that time. It was being proposed at that time, but we did not have anything officially on the books in 1982-83. There was nothing there to give us the legal authority to reintroduce an endangered animal that was not fully protected by the Endangered Species Act. The local people over there and the deer hunters were afraid that the Wolves were going to kill all of the deer and then possibly even shut down deer hunting in the Lake Between the Lakes area. Then the environmentalists thought that we were not going to provide them enough protection. The project started failing and we saw that it wasn't going to make it. We held five or six public meetings and they enlisted a tremendous amount of local interest. There was a lot of opposition and a lot of support. But the reality of the project was unless you had good public support you were really kind of spinning your wheels.

MR. GENTRY: Was that a lesson that you think that your group took to heart?

MR. PARKER: Absolutely.

MR. GENTRY: What then was the thing that you learned from the Land Between the Lakes experience?

MR. PARKER: You have to be honest with the local people. You can't pull the wool over them and be a politician. You have to tell them straight up in the best of your opinion and to the best of your knowledge what is going to happen. And you can't pull any punches. You've got to gain the confidence of the local people. That is a hard task; to walk into an area where a predatory animal has been gone for a hundred years and say "we want to put these animals back where they were". And then try to explain why this is in their best interest.

MR. GENTRY: They don't always see it that way.

MR. PARKER: That's right. They really don't understand that. Another key problem, the one that I failed to anticipate was the fact that the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area was designated when Johnson was President. Through condemnation, lands were taken from local people. There was a great deal of animosity towards TVA over there. All of a sudden the Fish and Wildlife Service and TVA were in bed together. A lot of local people who had lost properties to the Federal government for the National Recreation Area came to the public meetings and blasted the Fish and Wildlife Service along with TVA. It gave them a podium to blast the project as well as the whole idea of the Federal government being involved in that area. This really hurt the whole project.

MR. GENTRY: Did you start the St. Vincent's Island project?

MR. PARKER: Yes.

MR. GENTRY: Tell me about that. What was the purpose there?

MR. PARKER: One of the problems in dealing with the Red Wolf was that we had a captive breeding project out at Graham, Washington. And there were half a dozen or less Zoos around the country that had captive animals in pens. These were second and third and fourth generation captive animals that had never been in the wild. I came up with the idea of using Fish and Wildlife Service islands in the southeast, and releasing captive animals on those islands. This would allow them to breed and bring offspring on those islands, which should theoretically be wild animals, which would be wild stock to utilize in a reintroduction project. I think this proved to be a very valuable concept. I think that

a lot of the success of the Alligator River project has come about because of using animals that were born in the wild, instead of captive animals that had never been in the wild.

MR. GENTRY: Let's go back to the public meetings. Was dealing with the public the most difficult part of the recovery?

MR. PARKER: Oh yes, absolutely. Dealing with the public is the absolute key. If you can gain the confidence again, and be completely honest and straightforward with the public, you are miles ahead.

MR. GENTRY: You have had other, vast experiences with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Does that same message or way of operating carry over into all of the other things that we do?

MR. PARKER: I think it does. In any aspect of resource management, the public has to be made aware of what the situation is. And then you try and get them involved in the project in any way that you can come up with. It is all in the public interest, and in the interest of the resource to get the public involved at any level you can, at any level you can either volunteer, or whatever. The main thing up front is to make sure that you tell them the truth.

MR. GENTRY: From what I have heard of the history of the Service, and the way the Refuges have been in the past, that was a hard lesson to learn.

MR. PARKER: Really! That is correct.

MR. GENTRY: Can you talk about that, about way back when, and you're seeing it change?

MR. PARKER: That's been true over the years on all of the Federal projects. I worked on Savannah National Refuge, which was my first job with the Fish and Wildlife Service back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. That problem was even there at Savannah. Although Savannah provided a lot of income for local hardware stores, and places around like that but the very fact that a lot of that Federal property had been taken away and was now in Federal ownership was a problem. It was now up to the Refuge Manager to permit trapping or public hunting or whatever on the Refuge. I think that this was a sore spot with the local people. Therefore, you had to go out of your way as a Manager to make sure that you continued to help the public in their quest for resources as far as fur harvest or hunting, fishing or whatever it might be, even gathering medicinal plants. If it's feasible to let the public participate and be involved on the Refuge, I think that's a key to the success of any Refuge effort. I know that it is true in the event of trying to reintroduce an endangered species that has been gone for many, many years. If you can't gain that confidence, then you are going to have a tough time of it.

MR. GENTRY: How do you feel about the Red Wolf program there? Are you keeping up with?

MR. PARKER: I keep up with it through Gary Henry. Gary is now retired, so I won't have any real source of information. But the project in eastern North Carolina has gone very well. I would like to go back in a moment and go through some of the historical facets about the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge project. The project in the Smokeys, which I initiated in 1989 failed because of several reasons. One was that the Park really didn't have the prey base, except in Cave's Cove where we reintroduced animals into the area. We had animals leaving the Park and we found that it was difficult to keep the animals in the Park, primarily because of the prey base. The prey base just isn't that good in the Park because it is all old growth. Therefore, the small mammal base isn't there for the Wolf to prey on. That project, when I was in charge of the program was set up as a two-year experiment to see if the project could succeed. But it was also to see what the interactions between the Coyote, which was then expanding not only into the Park but also into eastern North Carolina. We wanted to see if it was possible to reintroduce Wolves into an area where you already have resident Coyotes. That was the original thesis for the project. It was a two-year project, but then I retired in 1990 and the project was kept on track for another three or four years. I think that I might have pulled the plug a little earlier. But nevertheless, a great deal of knowledge and information was gained from the project in the Smokey Mountain National Park.

The project at Alligator River is relatively secure. I think that there will be Red Wolves in that area for many, many years. The only thing that I regret is that we didn't try another reintroduction site somewhere in the intervening years. Where that would have been, I am not sure. I probably would have attempted one on the Francis Marion National Forest, which is near Bull's Island. We had great public support there in that area north of Charleston. On the Bull's Island project, I think the Forest Service would have worked with us. But again, the problem with the Red Wolf is the expansion of the Coyote into its former range. With the demise of the Wolf, the Coyote has moved east.

MR. GENTRY: You said you wanted to talk about some historical things in the Red Wolf project. Let's go back and go over those.

MR. PARKER: In 1984 the Prudential Insurance Company offered to give the property that is now known as the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge to the Federal government for a tax write-off. As I understand, going back those many years ago to the mid 1980s, Prudential was financially strapped and having a difficult time with that property down there. They were having a difficult time in managing that property in mainland Dare County for farming. They decided to take the tax write-off and donate the one hundred and eighty thousand acres or so to the Federal government. The Fish and Wildlife Service secured the land through that arrangement. Immediately I saw that this

land down there, which is a peninsula, might be an ideal site for a Red Wolf reintroduction because there was water on three sides. It was a fairly sizeable piece of property with adjacent properties that might be made available for expansion onto private lands. The new Refuge Manager down there was John Taylor. He and I became close friends. John came down from Alaska where he had initiated a new Wildlife Refuge. He was very much interested in Wolves. John became my right hand man; he and I really worked together for about a year trying to secure the interest and support of local people in the Dare County area and in surrounding areas. We wound up hosting four public meetings down there and after a year of working with the people there, we ended up getting about eighty or ninety percent support from the local people. I thought that this was extraordinary. The Red Wolf had been gone from eastern North Carolina for about two hundred years. So this was novel, and it was really different. But I think that the public realized the plight of the Red Wolf and I give those people a lot of credit, I'll have to say; they were really willing to work with us and that made it more important to John and I to give them the straight facts as we knew them. There were some things that we told those people that didn't turn out the way that we thought they would. One of the major ones that I still have nightmares about was the recapture collar. Dave Meach and I had worked together some in northern Minnesota in an effort to learn about Wolves and capture techniques. Dave is the acknowledged Wolf specialist in the world probably. Dave and I became good friends. Dave was interested in developing a recapture collar, which was a collar that you fitted around the neck of an animal. You could, through darts implanted in the collar, tranquilize the animal by remote radio signal. You could then go and pick the animal up. This was a tremendous reintroduction ploy. The local public thought that this sounded great. If you can put collar on these animals and "If they end up in my back yard you can knock them down and go pick them up". It was great PR. Dave and I went to 3M in St. Paul, Minnesota, and somehow or another those people decided that this idea had some merit. They agreed to develop the recapture collar for us. After the support of the local people, and including this concept of the recapture collar to which I attribute gaining their support, the animals actually got to the Alligator National Wildlife Refuge, and we put the animals out in the wild after acclimation, we found that the recapture collars were failing. They were not working. Some of the collars worked, and some didn't. There were a lot of gold connections in the collar technology, as I understand it. The salt-water environment down there in mainland Dare County was just too harsh. It caused corrosion in some of the internal components.

MR. GENTRY: So they failed. And to the locals, you were a liar probably.

MR. PARKER: That is right. However, we talked to a lot of people. We started to hold a public meeting and explain the problem but we talked to some local people and they kind of understood. Again, that was three or four months into the project, and given that three or four month period of time, the Wolves had not created a problem with anybody. I think that kind of took the edge off of the potential for public problems. There was a chicken lost every now and then. There were some other problems that came up but

these were mainly law enforcement type problems. One of the things that I told the people was that under this experimental, nonessential designation of these animals; if a hunter for example, happened to shoot a deer and the bullet went through the deer and killed a Wolf we wouldn't prosecute. This was a hypothetical example that I gave them. And of course there was no intent involved. Then we had a case down there in which one of the gentlemen that I had talked to, and who was supporting the project; he was a trapper on the Refuge, caught a Red Wolf in one of his sets and the Wolf drowned. His intent, I am sure was not to catch a Red Wolf, but the way that he had set his traps had violated State Fish and Game Commission law. Our law enforcement people decided that they wanted to get involved too and that became an issue and a little bit of a problem. From the biological perspective, and I can only speak from that end of it since I am not a Law Enforcement Agent, we did everything that we could to isolate the public from any actual involvement in killing a Wolf. A Wolf hit by a car at night is something that we would not prosecute. That was the attitude that we took. And that attitude held good the whole time that I was involved in the project, and I think that continues today. There has been some "blips" here and there with the project; local landowners shoot one, thinking that it is a Coyote, and all of a sudden they are being prosecuted by the Federal government. That's happened, and it has caused some real hard feelings. But by and large the idea that John Taylor and I presented to the people down there; we maintained that continuity of thought and intent. There was never any intent to do anything except for what we did. But I am getting ahead of myself; after five years, we did go back and hold public meetings down there. After the Wolves were released, there was a five-year interim. We evaluated the project and went back and held public meetings and the public was, by and large, was still ninety percent in favor of the project because there had been no interactions or problems. Nobody had been attacked by a Wolf. Again, I think that the project was successful. The only problem down there now is the potential for interbreeding with Coyotes.

MR. GENTRY: That is still a problem?

MR. PARKER: It is still a problem, and will probably always be a peripheral problem. The concept, as Curt Carley explained to me, and I accepted, is that you can maintain a core base of pure Red Wolves, but on the perimeter you are going to have some interbreeding. Which now, they are finding is true even up in Canada with the Grey Wolves in Ontario and in northern Minnesota. Those animals' genetic makeup has been tainted by Coyote genetics. If you talk about pure Grey Wolves, you have to be careful about where you are talking about.

MR. GENTRY: Pure anything!

MR. PARKER: That's right! [Laughing]

MR. GENTRY: The life expectancy of any Endangered Species Coordinator is pretty precarious isn't it?

MR. PARKER: Oh yeah! Well, I was fortunate, because I had timed my retirement well. I had planned my retirement, and when I hit thirty-two years, I decided to retire. In a way, I am glad that I did, and in a way, I wish I had stayed another two or three years. I really enjoyed it. I thought that that was one of the best jobs in the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Park Superintendent in the Great Smokeys, and I'm not trying to blow my own horn, but he really hated to see me retire. But Gary Henry, who I had hired, was with the Forest Service and he came down and worked with me and I wanted Gary to take my place because I trusted him. I knew that he was a top biologist and I knew that he could handle the job easily, and he did. Gary did a fine job with it. But yes, a Coordinators job is one where if you are successful, you have worked yourself out of a job.

MR. GENTRY: And if you're not?

MR. PARKER: And if you're not [successful] you're in the frying pan with the Fish and Wildlife Service! I still think that the Coordinators have sort of fallen by the wayside. They don't seem to be the key that they used to be. The Coordinator, to me, is the guy that the Fish and Wildlife Service should depend on. You don't give a job to a Coordinator unless he's the guy that's going to do the job. Then you turn loose, you don't put constraints on him, and you let him go. Let him run his budget, and he gets the job done. Fortunately for me, my Supervisor was in Atlanta, in the Regional office there. And he gave me carte blanche and let me do what I wanted to do and what I had to do. In my opinion, that's the way that the Coordinator job can be best handled. Trust the guy, pay him the salary and let him loose, and he'll do the job. I have every confidence in the Fish and Wildlife Services professional staff.

MR. GENTRY: We were talking about some of the public problems with the Red Wolf and other endangered species; what about biological problems that you had with the Red Wolf?

MR. PARKER: There were biological problems. I am sure that Curt Carley has told you about these. The remnant animals that we had to deal with were numbered in the fourteen, fifteen, sixteen realm. That was the genetic pool from which we had to work which was always a concern. There was always a fear of inter-breeding, genetic bottlenecks, so that was always in back of our minds. In the project out at Graham, Washington, Sue Burns took care of the Wolves. Sue was very careful in separating these animals, genetically, as far as she could. The gene pool to start with was very small, but you try to expand that as much as you can, and that was a problem. Looking back at the Land Between the Lakes and the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge projects, actually the Wolves themselves were not difficult to deal with biologically. It was easy to

trap a Wolf, but it is hard to catch a Coyote. Mike Phillips came down; John Taylor and I hired Mike Phillips. Mike was in Alaska at the time and he came down and took over the Field Project at Alligator River. Mike did a splendid job. And that was a day and nighttime job. You had to be all the time, and he did a great job. But again, the Wolves were not that hard to deal with. If you had to catch a rogue Wolf, he wasn't all that hard to catch. But now the Coyote moving in has proven to be another problem. They are much more difficult to capture and control. On the periphery of the core population of Wolves, there is inter-breeding going on. That is one thing that we found out. The problem with the Red Wolf of course is having big enough areas in which to reintroduce these animals. I am afraid the clock is just moving against the Red Wolf as far as having other areas in which to reintroduce them. I mentioned other reintroduction areas, but today there are probably no other areas in the southeast to release the Red Wolf because there are Coyote populations established everywhere. One of the things that I was concerned about with the Mexican Wolf project out in Arizona, was the fact that the Mexican Wolf had been gone from the lower forty-eight for many years. There were still a few animals left in old Mexico, but in the interim the Coyote population had filled that void where the Wolves were at one time. I feel that they are going to be phased in with their reintroduction program, with the same problem of putting animals back into a sea of Coyotes and hoping that they can maintain themselves genetically.

MR. GENTRY: Is there anything else about Red Wolves that we need to hit on before I ask you just some general questions about the Service?

MR. PARKER: As I look back over the Red Wolf projects, back into the 1970s; I remember when I first went to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service, one of my first jobs was in Texas and Oklahoma on the Red River over there. I would meet State and Federal Animal Control Specialists who were trapping what now I know were Red Wolves, because of the predator-livestock problems. I have often wondered, and I wish that I had had the foresight to get involved with those trappers who were catching these animals. First of all, I wish that I had kept the animals, pelts and everything, because they just destroyed them. I would like to have found out, really, how much livestock damage was going on, or was this just something that was kept in place, and kept going on and on. It had become a perpetual motion machine almost, of trapping predators.

MR. GENTRY: So you saw a time when the Federal government was either at the same time, or making a transition of killing the Red Wolf?

MR. PARKER: Oh yeah, in north Texas in the Sulfur River Bottoms, and in the northern Red River area there was active participation by the Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the States of Oklahoma and Texas in trapping these animals.

MR. GENTRY: And at the same time you were working for them?

MR. PARKER: No, this was back in the early 1960s.

MR. GENTRY: So, not then years after that, you were trying to save them?

MR. PARKER: That's correct. I worked in Vicksburg, Mississippi for a few years and I remember a Canadian biologist, he was Dave Meacher's mentor, and I can't remember his name, but he was down south of Vicksburg on one of the islands in the river, trapping Wolves, and they were Red Wolves. He was trying to document the status of the Red Wolf. And this was a Canadian biologist now, who is now dead. But he was one of Dave Meacher's mentors. I wish I could come up with his name. I do remember that; there was active interest in the Red Wolf, even at that time. All of that was coming to a head when Curt Carley got involved with the demise of the Red Wolf, and the Fish and Wildlife Service was involved in the demise! So, what comes around goes around! A few years later we are pumping Fish and Wildlife Service money into trying to get the Wolf back into the wild. It is kind of an interesting scenario if you get to thinking about it.

MR. GENTRY: We hopefully learn from our mistakes.

MR. PARKER: That was in the old days. Predators were looked on with great disfavor. Cougars and Wolves and Eagles, anything that preyed on game animals was looked on with great disfavor.

MR. GENTRY: I take it that you are saying that it wasn't necessarily the "good old days"?

MR. PARKER: That's right! People think about it, but it wasn't! Our biology was really skewed.

MR. GENTRY: How much progress do you think that we have made?

MR. PARKER: Oh, enormous progress. The Endangered Species Act was the greatest piece of wildlife legislation ever signed into law. It changed the Fish and Wildlife Service from a bunch of waterfowl biologists essentially, or game biologists, into real biologists, with a full perspective of what's going on out there. Because when the law was signed in, in 1973 there was not a cadre of people in the Fish and Wildlife Service to take over this magnificent piece of legislation, nobody. I remember that Keith Schriener was the first to be in charge of the Endangered Species program in Washington. He had to go out to the Universities to recruit people who were specialists. Nobody hardly in the Fish and Wildlife Service was knowledgeable about endangered species.

MR. GENTRY: I guess you must have left the Service just before the Ecosystem Management came in. Are you familiar with that?

MR. PARKER: Basically, yes.

MR. GENTRY: Do you see that as another step in the right direction?

MR. PARKER: Yeah.

MR. GENTRY: Tell me about that.

MR. PARKER: Managing the ecosystem is important. I worked in Vicksburg in what they used to call River Basins. That was almost an ecosystem concept, but not as expanded as it is today. We were looking at river basins, the whole river basin. We were surveying the Red River, and the White River in Arkansas for example. Also the Hatchaphalia [sic] or whatever river it is, a basin. The Service was sort of forced into it at the time by the Army Corps of Engineers because they wanted to develop those River Bottoms, so the Service became involved in a roundabout way. It was not because somebody had the bright idea that we ought to be doing this, but because of a reaction to the Army Corps of Engineers and their Water Resource projects. In a miniscule way, we were involved in an almost ecosystem approach at that time. But non-game was not considered. It was strictly from a game resource perspective, and a Fisheries resource perspective that was based on the krill census. So today we have expanded from that into the whole kit and caboodle. But again, I think that the Endangered Species Act is what stimulated this whole idea. Over the years a cadre of Fish and Wildlife Service employees, of which I was one, became involved in the Endangered Species Act and then our perspective changed. The whole concept of "Game Management" which were taught in school, changed to "Wildlife Management", all wildlife. Then of course you get involved in the ecosystem concept. So it is a natural evolution, but the Endangered Species Act, in 1973, was the sparkplug that started this whole process, in my opinion.

MR. GENTRY: O.K. What other major changes have you seen in the Service over your thirty-two year career?

MR. PARKER: The one thing that I talk about with a lot of my cronies, and I don't mean to "knock" the Service: let me say first that I love the Fish and Wildlife Service, but unfortunately people are coming into the Service today who are not hunters and are not fishermen. Their perspective about hunting and fishing is not what it was before. I am shooting from the hip now, and I hope that I am wrong. I have a feeling, and a lot of my state compatriots say the same thing. The Wildlife Commission here in North Carolina is hiring people that are not hunting or fishing. Therefore, their concept is more protective. Which I, as an old-schooler have a problem with. I view our resources out there as renewable resources. Hunting is part of that, legitimately. The Pittman-Robinson Program, which I was involved with for about ten years, has done so much good for wildlife management in the United States through PR [Pittman-Robinson] and "DJ" monies to the States. Really, a lot of the land that was purchased with PR monies not

only was preserving deer and waterfowl and other games species, but enormous amounts of non-game species at the same time. In a way, the ecosystem approach was being practiced, but we didn't know it. We didn't realize it.

MR. GENTRY: When you, in your earliest days in the Service, maybe before you were in the Service: as I understand the history of wildlife in the part of the country where I come from: did you find that there were virtually no deer left?

MR. PARKER: That's right, the deer were gone.

MR. GENTRY: Give me a little perspective about that, of what change that you have seen.

MR. PARKER: Well, when I was a youngster, there were no deer in Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. I went to NC State. There were no deer. There were a few remnant native, original eastern wild turkeys in the River bottoms. I used to hunt those. But squirrel hunting was the thing. If you really wanted to be adventurous you went turkey hunting. But there were no deer. Again, squirrel hunting was the entry for people that wanted to hunt.

MR. GENTRY: This was because there were no deer.

MR. PARKER: That's right.

MR. GENTRY: When did you start to see it change? And how and what made it change?

MR. PARKER: Again, I have to go back to the Pittman-Robinson program. The monies that went to the States from the tax on firearms and ammunition generated the World War II veterans that came out of wildlife schools. I am a Korean War veteran, and I worked with a lot of these guys. But the World War II guys were the "old" guys to me. [Laughing] Now I am an old guy! These are the guys that I worked with, and my mentors were the World War II vets who came back and became Wildlife Managers. With the help of the Pittman-Robinson program, these guys took the money and started restocking deer. They were taking deer out of Wisconsin, or wherever they could get deer. That program became one of the biggest success stories in the Pittman-Robinson program; the reintroduction of the Whitetail Deer. Again, I go back and think of many of these guys from World War II. I mean these guys drank, and fought, they would get in fistfights. I was overawed with these guys all of the time because they were "rough and ready" people! At night you played poker, all night even if you didn't want to! It was different world, back in the 1960s, because that was it. These were all World War II vets and they were hard lifers. I got sucked in with these guys. I admired them a great deal, but after a week with them, I was ready to go home! But I will give them the credit!

MR. GENTRY: It sounds almost like Whitetail Deer was an endangered species without us ever recognizing it.

MR. PARKER: That's correct. But the reintroduction of these animals, you see, those were the reintroductions that started this whole concept of reintroductions. It all started with bringing the Whitetail Deer back. The Wisconsin deer are still talked about around here, on the Biltmore estate here in western North Carolina. These were Wisconsin "blue" deer. They called the blue deer because they are dark colored deer. You still hear people around here in the mountains say that they have seen a blue deer every now and then. These are remnants of that genetic pool of Wisconsin animals. I'll have to say that the Pittman-Robinson program and the World War II vets who went to Wildlife School are responsible, in my opinion, for what you see today in the deer population and the turkey population in the southeast. The Wild Turkey became a prime reintroduction candidate, and it has been nothing but a big success story. I have helped guys in Kentucky release turkeys, and I have helped them release deer. One of my treasured memories of the Pittman-Robinson program was working with those State biologists. Those guys knew what they were doing. And they were dedicated; they would stay out there all night.

MR. GENTRY: How have you seen the relationship between Fed and State work over the years?

MR. PARKER: Well, years ago, and I have been out of it for ten years now, and I have been out of the Pittman-Robinson program for twenty years, or more.

MR. GENTRY: In your time, how did it work?

MR. PARKER: In my time; first of all the Fish and Wildlife Service used to recruit these guys out of the States. That was the way that the Pittman-Robinson program was run, years ago. Back in the 1940s, and 1950s, the old days. You recruited State guys to come and work for the Fish and Wildlife Service in Federal Aide. Therefore you had a cadre of State people that knew what they were doing. They started working with the Feds and they took over the Pittman-Robinson program. These guys really knew what they were doing! That has shifted now. The salaries are one thing. The State salaries are now more comparable to the Federal salaries. Therefore these guys don't feel like they have to leave their State jobs to go and work for the Feds. That has been a change, and again, I am shooting from the hip now, so forgive me; but unfortunately the people just don't have the experience. Now, I sound like an old-timer that is wore out but I really feel that the Service has been drained of a lot of its talent over the years through retirements. The people coming on out of school really haven't had the opportunity to get the hands on experience that these guys had in the "old" days. And again, I don't mean to shoot from the hip.

MR. GENTRY: You are not the first person that I have heard that from. People who are the best and brightest in the Service today, some will say that same thing; That there are a lot of the jobs that need to be done that people learn from living in the country, driving tractors and that kind of thing.

MR. PARKER: That's right. That's a good point. And one that I didn't bring up was that the pool of people that they used to draw from, these guys out of World War II, like I said, these people came from rural backgrounds. They knew more about dealing with rural people. I could see that problem in my latter years in the Fish and Wildlife Service. People were coming into the Service that had lived in a city all of their lives, and they went to wildlife school or forestry school. I am not knocking the people; it's just that they didn't have the opportunity to get the knowledge that they needed to work with the local people on site with wildlife. I am sure that the Forest Service has the same problem. I have heard that they are in the same situation. Of course they are drawing now, primarily from an urban situation. The population is practically all urban now!

MR. GENTRY: Well, we won't beat that one to death.

MR. PARKER: No! And I don't mean to either. There's a lot of good people.

MR. GENTRY: In other interviews, I have heard that that is a factor. You know, whenever a new person comes on and maybe you have to spend a lot of time. One of the Refuge Managers says, "I have to spend a lot of time teaching a very bright biologist how to run a chainsaw"!

MR. PARKER: Or, how to drive a tractor!

MR. GENTRY: Those are basic skills that most of the former people came from because that was the way they were raised.

MR. PARKER: That's right. And when you talk about cover crops, or mowing, it's a terminology or nomenclature that you have to learn. And you have to learn it on the job.

MR. GENTRY: So we will just have to train them!

MR. PARKER: That's right!

MR. GENTRY: That's why we have NCTC there!

MR. PARKER: That's right! [Both laughing]

MR. GENTRY: If you were going to talk to Mark Madison, he's going to be listening to all of this. He's our Historian. What kind of message would you leave with this new breed of Fish and Wildlife Service people?

MR. PARKER: Well, in a way, they are probably better than the "old-timers" were. They have technology on their side now. They've got computers, and the ability to keep information that we kept on yellow legal pads, and sometimes lost. So technology is on the side of the resources managers now that we didn't have before. I can't even run a computer, so I am completely lost. The technology is there, but I would urge anybody coming into the Fish and Wildlife Service to get out in the field, and stay out in the field. We used to camp for weeks doing fieldwork. Take a tent and camp out on site. That way you are there, you know more, and you get to learn more about an area. Of course, back then, a motel was three dollars a night, but our per diem was only ten dollars a day and we hated to spend that money. We camped out a lot!

MR. GENTRY: Just out of curiosity, what kind of money did you make when you first came into the Service?

MR. PARKER: I worked for the State of North Carolina for two years and when I left North Carolina, I started out making \$4,040.00 a year. Of course, all my life I had either wanted to get into Forestry and/or Wildlife work.

MR. GENTRY: What year was that?

MR. PARKER: That would have been 1960.

MR. GENTRY: That wasn't bad money then.

MR. PARKER: Oh no! We had three kids, and we did fine.

MR. GENTRY: So the pay wasn't that bad.

MR. PARKER: Oh no, I'm not trying to say that we were poor people! We weren't, we got along fine. But we weren't going to get rich doing it. I thought that anybody making \$12,000.00 a year was a rich person. As I said, motels were three or four dollars a night, and in the field, we knew where every one of them was. Sometimes we could find one that was two dollars a night. We were cheap. And I am talking about nothing but a bed, and no TV. Sometimes the bed wasn't even level but you just accepted that.

MR. GENTRY: Did you ever meet some of the so-called Conservation Heroes, like Rachel Carson?

MR. PARKER: I never met her. I knew Lynn Greenwalt, and people like that. Rachel Carson was active when I was working, that was in the 1960s. But I never met her.

MR. GENTRY: Did you ever hear anything about her?

MR. PARKER: Oh yes. Absolutely. I thought that she was on the right track. I thought that she was somebody who knew what she was talking about.

MR. GENTRY: Tell us what you mean when you say that you thought she was “on the right track”.

MR. PARKER: With the whole concept of our environment and our ruining of our environment, this gets into a tough subject. Al Gore is talking about that today, right now probably, somewhere. Unfortunately, man’s population is growing and our demands and our needs are growing disproportionately to the rest of the world. We make up a very small part of the world’s population, but we consume maybe thirty percent of the world’s resources, in this country. I think that we have lost our ethics as far as natural resources go. We are losing to big business and to a whole lot of other factors. We are putting a lot of valuable property under asphalt. And it is going to require better and sharper Managers to take care of a dwindling resource out there. This is not something new. But yes, Rachel Carson was ahead of her time as far as what was happening to our natural resources and our environment. But you know, back at that time, I don’t think that anybody appreciated it. It is easy to look back now, thirty years later and say, “Boy she hit the nail right on the head”. But at that time it didn’t hit like it does now.

MR. GENTRY: Did it “hit” in the Service?

MR. PARKER: I don’t think so. No. Again, I keep going back to the Endangered Species Act in 1973, when President Nixon signed this into law. It took the Endangered Species Act to bring people out of their holes, in my opinion. It did for me. I didn’t know anything about some of these species out here that were in desperate shape; the Loggerhead Sea Turtles, the Bachman’s Warbler, you can name hundreds and hundreds of species that nobody knew anything about, or cared about! The Red Wolf was one of them. And all of a sudden The Act made them prominent species. I think that if it hadn’t have been for the Endangered Species Act, the Service would still be, well, it would be a lot further than it was, but it wouldn’t be as far as it is, as far as our perspective on ecosystem or resource management. The Endangered Species Act was a trigger, and to me it will always be the trigger that started this whole process. Again, when you looked at the Service for cadre to work in the endangered animal field, there were few, or nobody there. Our whole training and perspective was on game management, waterfowl or whatever. Refuge Managers’ only perspective was on waterfowl management. Again, I think that the people in the Fish and Wildlife Service are, and have been great people. I

feel like I was very fortunate, just extremely fortunate, to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service, and to get to meet and work with the people there.

MR. GENTRY: Well, we'll end this by just asking if you would still recommend it to a young biologist?

MR. PARKER: Absolutely! Again, I regret now, that I retired when I did. Although I had planned to retire, I wish that I had worked another three or four years.

MR. GENTRY: You'd be working right now wouldn't you?

MR. PARKER: Oh, I'd love to. Boy, I'd love to!

MR. GENTRY: I appreciate your time in granting this interview.